

## RACE AND INSANITY.

### THE NEGRO RACE.<sup>1</sup>

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AMONG the psychical phenomena presented by negroes which most deserve study are the revival of the Voodoo superstitions and the frequent recurrence of attacks of sexual furor, especially in the spring. These last, in their predominant characteristics, most strongly resemble the attacks of sexual furor in the bull and elephant, and are also analogous to the running "amok" of the Malay. It is difficult to study these attacks of furor, since they are soon treated by the prescription of lead, hemp, or steel in sufficient quantities to produce euthanasia. It is noteworthy that these attacks were rare during the war when the fidelity of the negro to the wife and children of his absent master was proverbial, and that they are especially frequent in States once cursed by "carpet-bag" statesmen, where changes in the social status of the negro were especially frequent.

Is the insanity of the negro tinged by the psychical phenomena just mentioned? Paretic dementia, a psychical manifestation of a cerebral disease, is a psychosis which offers good means of testing this question.

Among the cases admitted to the Cook County Hospital for the Insane, was

G. B., who was forty-nine years old, a man of good general education, a professional pugilist, a man of powerful build. At the end of the exciting political campaign of 1884 he became

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<sup>1</sup> A series of studies in ethnological psychiatry.

emotionally exalted, and in about one month was admitted to the above-mentioned institution. He had had syphilis five years before admission. His knee jerk and gait were normal, but his grasp of the dynamometer resulted in a very irregular wavy line. He claimed to be the greatest tragedian in the world, and to be very wealthy. He spoke slowly and deliberately, and was very dignified in his manner. The day following he had a sudden attack of furor, and gave evidences of visual hallucinations. His speech had become hesitant, his pupils unequal, and tongue tremulous. He claimed to have the largest brain in the world. For the next few days he was very emotionally exalted. He claimed to be able to whip all the pugilists, and to be worth millions.

In about a week thereafter he complained of neuralgic cephalic pains, which he two days afterwards ascribed to a spell laid on him; "he was hoodooed." The same night he set fire to his bed-tick to burn the witches out of it. He "saw two of them, and twice he burned them up." Three days after this he began to display olfactory and gustatory hallucinations, and in a week both senses were much diminished, smell being almost destroyed. About the same time he had a violent attack of sexual furor, followed by an hallucination of a woman "older than Eve, but more beautiful, with whom he had intercourse." His sense of taste and smell are now much impaired, and he is rather querulent.

In this case it will be noted that syphilis existed long before the parietic dementia, but syphilis was very common among negroes, before the war, despite which parietic dementia was rare until they were subject to the strain of commercial life. Certainly the negroes in New York are not less libidinous nor less syphilitic than those of Chicago, but parietic dementia is less common among the former. This would seem to indicate that the predisposing influence of lues is not as great as has lately been supposed to be the case. The ideas about "hoodooing" were not strictly delusions, but the result of mental weakness. In an ordinary negro these would have been without significance, but this man, a leader among his people, had encouraged scepticism as to hoodooism. When his intellect began to be impaired and he could not account for his neuralgiæ he referred them to witches, after referring them at first to electricity. Despite his enormous strength and skill as a boxer, he was easily managed as a rule. His sexual furor was a decided furor closely resembling that occasionally noticed in the cynocephalus. His visual hallucinations were all obviously secondary.

Those about witches arose from the neuralgiæ, having suggested occult influences.

The general characteristics of the next are much the same as the former, but the man was of decidedly lower mental calibre.

CASE II.—J. W., age, thirty-seven, nativity, American; education, common school; Protestant, married; business, bar-tender; has had syphilis ten years ago. Knee-jerk asymmetrical: exaggerated right, a diminished left; temperature  $97\frac{1}{2}$  in right axilla, normal in left. On admission it was found that the patient had always been temperate and of a quiet disposition, reserved and uncommunicative. He has had trouble with his family about some property left him by his father. Says he is king of the world, that he laid out the City of Chicago, and that he is going to build a wall around it. Feels happy and contented, and is inclined to make puns. On the next day uncontrollable sexual furor. Tore up the water closet, and attacked the attendants. Three weeks later complained of being "hoodooed," which stopped his thoughts. He has seen the person who "hoodooed" him. His sense of smell was at first keen, even exaggerated, but latterly he had olfactory hallucinations followed by its disappearance. He died of apoplexy.

CASE III.—J. B., barber, age forty, special senses normal on admission, knee-jerk exaggerated on right, absent on left. Has had syphilis five years ago. Has some bronchitis. Skull prognathous dolicocephalic. Says he is building golden churches on Michigan Avenue; is the Son of God. Went to the alarm box and telegraphed Mayor Harrison that he would call on him this evening in a carriage. Has hesitant speech. Claims to be a member of the Trinity. He had a tremulous tongue, facial folds unequal; knee-jerk normal. He claims that Mayor Harrison is superintendent of his works. He claims to own Philadelphia and Chicago. States that Mayor Harrison is the "sixth" God, but as a deity, is inferior to himself. In a colloquy with a white parietic dement he recognized the absurdity of the latter's delusions. He has been relatively quiet. Made several attempts to get out of the door. Refused to eat in dining-room; wanted to go up stairs to eat with "God," whose food he smelt. Quiet until bed time, then he was obstinate. Three weeks later he was dirty in habits. He displays marked parietic furor, and has very marked grandiose delusions. He died suddenly of apoplexy.

CASE IV.—D. W., age thirty-four, married. For a year before admission he was melancholy and dextrat, and showed a great tendency to forgetfulness. Seven years ago contracted syphilis. About a month before admission he stole a milk can in open day, and in presence of a policeman, to whom he offered to sell it. He was arrested, sent to the Bridewell, and there found to be insane.

He claimed to be immensely wealthy, owning millions of gold and coal mines, and being the "prime" secretary of God. His pupils and facial folds were unequal; tongue tremulous. His right knee-jerk was exaggerated; left normal. He began to complain of pains in the head about three weeks after admission, which was followed by ideas about being hoodooed. He, however, had such ideas before he became insane.

CASE V.—A. H., aged fifty-five, laborer. When twenty years old contracted syphilis. About the age of forty-five he began to experience lightning-like pains in the limbs, followed by the development of locomotor ataxia. Two years before admission had frequently recurring attacks of melancholia of brief duration. On admission was very jovial and exuberant. The bulbar symptoms of the disease were well marked; both knee jerks were absent. He had the delusion that his legs were made of gold. That he had a million diamonds in his head. That his eyes were made of crystal, and hung on a gold pin. He had frequent lachrymose periods, followed by periods of exuberance. At times he ascribed his lightning-like pains to "hoodooism," but in a way a sane negro might have done.

The psychical peculiarities dormant in the race crop out very prominently in these cases, and it would appear certain from these that the question about the influence of the superstitions of the race must be answered in the affirmative.